

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date:	October 21, 2024
Action Required:	Approval of the <i>2024 ReadyKids Youth Services Project</i> and the appropriation of associated CDBG-CV COVID relief funds, in the amount of \$50,000
Presenter:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst
Staff Contacts:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst Taylor Harvey-Ryan, Grants Program Manager
Title:	Public Hearing and Resolution for the 2024 ReadyKids Youth Services Proposal, a Major Amendment to the Program Year 2024-25 Annual Action Plan in the amount of \$50,000 (CDBG-CV) (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville is an Entitlement Community (EC) as designated by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and, as such, is the recipient of annual allocations of federal funds through the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program. This proposal seeks to continue the city's proud tradition of using CDBG funds to support meaningful high impact community development activities by supporting the preservation and strengthening of the services ReadyKids is able to provide to area youth and families who have been severely impacted by the COVID pandemic.

Discussion

ReadyKids is one of the oldest nonprofit organizations in Charlottesville and has been providing valuable supports to area families and children in need for over 100 years, having first opened their doors in 1921 as the Children's Home, a residence for children orphaned by the Spanish flu epidemic. ReadyKids provides a wide range of critical supports to area children and families in the city of Charlottesville through counseling programs, family supports and early learning opportunities, all in support of a vision of 'a world where every child is learning, healthy and safe.'

Over its long history of service here in Charlottesville, ReadyKids has built its programs on a commitment to community engagement and cultural responsiveness to drive the evolution and adaptation of our programs that meet the current needs of children and their families. The most pressing area of need they encounter is a dramatic increase in requests for mental health supports, maternal and infant supports, and early learning opportunities growing out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Needs

ReadyKids continues to refine their understanding of the profound impacts of the COVID pandemic on the mental health and school readiness of area children and youth. Research and data indicate

that as a direct result of the pandemic youth are experiencing higher rates of isolation, depression, and anxiety. According to 2024 Kids Count Data Book, following COVID, 20% of American families have concerns about their child's developmental progress. Compounding this is the fact that households with children 0-4, up to 58% of those households had childcare that was disrupted due to COVID.

In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) declared a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health. Rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily from 2010-2020, and by 2018, suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. AAP concludes that the pandemic has intensified this crisis, as evidenced by dramatic increases nationwide in Emergency Department visits for all mental health emergencies, included attempted suicides.

This matches the steady increase year over year for referrals that ReadyKids has seen across all of their program areas. ReadyKids, for example, tracks the referrals for services it receives and in 2023, 408 referrals were left unfilled, demonstrating a significant need within the Charlottesville area that far surpasses their current capacity. In regard to early learning opportunities, for families with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level, there is one (1) publicly funded slot available for every seven (7) infants and toddlers. Similarly, Kindergarten readiness is a reliable predictor of later positive outcomes. In the state of Virginia, the lack of access to high-quality early learning opportunities following the pandemic as 68% of fourth graders are not proficient in reading, and 69% of eighth graders are not proficient in math.

In fiscal year 2024, ReadyKids provided services to over 5,000 kids, parents, and caregivers across their seven program areas.

Proposal

ReadyKids operates within an environment of ever-increasing need for its services combined with an ever-changing landscape of state and federal funding. The organization has faced significant funding loss due to these changes, both in terms of the amounts its traditional funders are able to provide through grants and donations but also through a diminishment of the buying power of the funding they do receive. ReadyKids received approximately \$145,000 from ARPA to sustain critical programs through the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the fact that these funds will soon be fully expended, the need for services persists and grows and ReadyKids remains committed to maintaining the stability and capacity of all of their program areas .

This challenging operating environment provides the City with an opportunity to draw on a portion of the unspent CDBG-CV COVID relief funds made available by HUD to help communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the funds proposed to be reprogrammed here constitute a portion of the COVID relief funds available to the city by HUD and have not previously been appropriated by Council, and, therefore, no current Council-approved activities will be impacted by approval of this this proposal.

Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of this funding include infants, children, and youth in the city of Charlottesville from ages 0-17 who are low-income, uninsured or underinsured, and who need access to the counseling, family support, and early learning opportunities in which ReadyKids

specializes. Beneficiaries of Inside Out counseling, for example, must be the victim of a crime or have experienced discrimination. Similarly, beneficiaries of the Teen Counseling program are teens in need of short-term crisis support for mental health needs and risk of family disruption. Beneficiaries of the Healthy Families program include those who are pregnant and/or families with children aged 0-5 who have high-risk factors in areas of: housing, employment, family disruption, adverse childhood experiences, and isolation. Beneficiaries of their Early Learning programs are children aged 0-5 and their caregivers. (Caregivers can include family members and early childcare providers.)

An ancillary benefit of this funding stems from the fact that while ReadyKids services are primarily directed at the children and youth they serve, the families of these youth and children also benefit in direct and indirect ways.

Conclusion

In the end, ReadyKids celebrated their centennial in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in spite of the challenges the pandemic presented, ReadyKids remained committed to its goal of ensuring that children and families in need were still safely receiving the services they needed during unprecedented times.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

The work of this proposal is closely aligned to City Council's vision of the City of Charlottesville as a community in which everyone can thrive. This alignment stems in part from its strengthening of Partnerships between the City and its youth services partners like ReadyKids. Additionally, Council has envisioned Charlottesville as a city committed to Education and supportive of broad and well-integrated educational opportunities ReadyKids provides.

This proposal also directly supports the City's Organizational Mission by reinforcing Charlottesville as a diverse and a compassionate organization dedicated to providing excellence in public service for a resilient and sustainable community.

Community Engagement

This proposal benefits from a high degree of community engagement, specifically related to the many forums and conversations the city has hosted about the need for supporting youth service programs. In addition, Council has long reviewed the goals & objectives of the city's CDBG program and renewed them on an annual basis at public hearings in which the community is invited to provide comment and the approved resolutions consistently prioritize supporting childcare services.

Additionally, two public hearings are scheduled for discussion of this proposal during which time members of the public are invited to provide comment prior to consideration and final approval by recorded vote of the duly elected City Council.

Budgetary Impact

As the funds proposed here are federal funds allocated to the City by HUD to support community-benefit activities, and, as such, do not draw from the city's General Fund, no adverse impacts to the City's budget are anticipated. Rather, use of these funds as recommended here will instead serve to address an important and pressing community need directly related to the ongoing COVID pandemic.

Recommendation

Based on the anticipated benefits of the current proposal to the children and families of Charlottesville struggling with the impacts of the COVID pandemic, staff recommends that Council approve the proposed use of CDBG-CV COVID relief funds as presented here. Staff also recommends Council approve the appropriation of associated funds within the city's CDBG Fund as needed to fully implement the proposed program and related enhancements:

I move that Council by the RESOLUTION before us approve the 2024 ReadyKids Youth Services Project and appropriate associated CDBG-CV COVID relief funds to support the implementation of this proposal.

Alternatives

Given that these funds are provided by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development to the City of Charlottesville for the execution of meaningful community-benefit programs and, as such, are not drawn from the city's General Fund, no alternatives courses of action are considered. Council, could, of course, decide not to provide approval for this proposal and could instead direct staff to explore other options for expending these funds.

Attachments

1. RES_2024 ReadyKids Youth Services Supports Proposal, \$50,000 (CDBG-CV) appropriation